Guidance IG(v)
Rights and Responsibilities of External Examiners

The audit of assessed work

1. External examiners are provided with the internally moderated sample of work from each classification (including borderlines and marginal fails) and representing all sites of delivery. The percentage of work shall reflect the number of students completing a particular assessment but in all cases shall meet the minimum of 10%. The minimum sample size is normally 6 and the maximum sample size 30, this amount may need to be exceeded where provision is franchised to multiple partners to ensure the sample meets the requirements above.

2. Examiners should also receive: the full range of marks within a module to see if the samples are representative of the spread of marks and an overview sheet giving statistics for all the modules (number of students, pass rate, mean mark, number in each classification band) to enable easier identification of modules that fall outside the norm. The guiding principle should be that external examiners have sufficient assessments and related information to assure themselves that internal marking and the resultant classification of awards are of an appropriate and consistent standard.

3. Assessed work of an ephemeral nature (presentations, performances etc.) must also be audited by an external examiner regardless of its weighting within a module. A sample of work matching the requirements for written work should either be witnessed by the external examiner, or should be recorded and sent to the external examination for audit. In exceptional cases, where external examiners cannot attend and where, for ethical reasons, it is not appropriate to record (e.g. for confidentiality reasons in healthcare), then a summary of the moderation procedures used and of the discussions between marker and moderator should be supplied to the external examiner.

4. In some instances it is expected that external examiners will meet individual students during their audit (eg. in professional practice, shows of student work, etc.). Discussion should normally be related to the particular assessment being audited. As part of the audit of assessment and associated procedures an external examiner may request a more general meeting with groups of students. There should normally be a good reason for such a meeting relating to standards and assessment procedures and its agenda should be restricted to such matters and discussed with appropriate academic staff. Normally a member of academic staff should attend such a meeting.

5. When new fields commence, external examiners are appointed to them. External examiners are expected to audit each module/level/year of new fields as they are introduced. For established fields, external examiners are expected to audit each module/level/year, where those modules contribute towards classification, for example, levels 5 and 6 for degree programmes, all level 7 for postgraduate programmes and level 5 for Foundation Degree programmes.

Note: Where assessment boards are established to consider levels (progression and intermediate awards) that do not contribute directly to the final
award, they are subsidiary to the programme assessment board and report to it for confirmation of all recommendations. Thus external examiners are formally involved with all decisions.

Consultation on draft assessments (coursework briefs and examination papers)

6. External examiners should be invited to comment on all draft assessments (coursework briefs and examination papers*) that comprise the major elements of assessment associated with a module and contribute to classification. External examiners should be invited to comment by a specified date that allows the timely presentation of examination papers to the Examinations section for processing. Draft assessments should be accompanied by model answers (where appropriate) and marking criteria. If no comments are received from the external examiner, the draft assessments (coursework and exams) will remain unchanged. External Examiners are not required to approve any draft assessments (course work briefs and examination papers).

*In the case of accredited programmes, PSRB requirements will prevail.

Viva-voce examinations

7. Where fields/programmes include viva-voce examinations as part of the assessment programme for all students, external examiners have the right to audit them in the same way as they might any other aspect of assessment.

8. Where viva-voce examinations are considered necessary as an additional or substitute form of assessment for some students the external examiner(s) have the right to audit them. Whilst staff of the University might seek the views of an external examiner as to whether a viva voce examination is appropriate in a particular circumstance, or an external examiner might advise that a viva voce examination should be carried out, it is for the internal staff to take the final decision whether to hold one. Internal examiners may invite an external examiner to take part in the viva voce examination and may seek the advice of the external examiner on the mark or grade but, as with all other assessments, it is the responsibility of the internal examiners to award the mark or grade.

Responsibility for agreeing marks and grades

9. The University has agreed that it is the responsibility of its academic staff, who are fulfilling the stated responsibility for maintaining the standards of awards, to determine the marks/grades to be awarded for assessed work. The University expects external examiners, in their independent auditor role, to advise the University on whether the standards set are appropriate, that the conclusions reached by internal examiners are fair and equitable, and that approved procedures have been followed. Consequently, the University does not expect external examiners to act as second or third ‘markers’, to arbitrate between unresolved internal marking differences, or to approve or agree marks. External examiners are able to audit a sample of the student work and it is clearly inequitable to consequently change marks relating only to that sample or to special cases presented by internal examiners.

10. The University has adopted the term internal moderation for procedures used by staff within the University to verify assessment standards. For example, draft assessments (coursework briefs and examination papers) should be
internally moderated and student assessed work may be internally moderated. In the latter case this is only one method for verifying academic standards, others include double marking, double blind marking etc. and are used where appropriate.

11. However, the guidance above does not mean that the advice of external examiners resulting from their audit samples should not be considered with great care or acted upon. Because of the role and responsibility of external examiners, it is expected that internal examiners and boards of examiners will take serious note of advice received and would need good reason for not acting upon it. Nonetheless it is the responsibility of internal examiners to prepare agreed marks for consideration by external examiners and assessment boards and it is the collective responsibility of the assessment board to take decisions concerning pass and fail, progression, awards, classification etc. The consensus view of an assessment board must prevail. The external examiner has a full opportunity to comment on decisions made by an assessment board in his/her report. In addition, the minutes of assessment boards record the commentaries of external examiners. As part of its quality assurance procedures, the University requires field teams to respond formally to the reports of external examiners and their minuted comments.

**Assessment Boards and external examiners**

12. External examiners are full members of the assessment boards to which they relate. As full members they are expected to attend the module assessment board(s) relating to their responsibilities. Only a sub-set of external examiners will be required to attend the programme assessment board. External examiners will be invited to give an oral report at the module and/or programme assessment board. External examiners might also meet with staff as part of an interim visit during the year.

13. Assessment boards are normally deemed quorate if all designated internal and external examiners are present (details of the procedures for non-attendance by an external examiner are given in section 4 of the undergraduate and postgraduate regulations and it is important that an external examiner is able to make an appropriate contribution to the decision making process even when he/she is exceptionally unable to attend the assessment board).

14. All formal decisions relating to awards, progression, and other aspects of student performance must be made at assessment board meetings. All information necessary to reach decisions must be available at assessment boards and full minutes must record such evidence and the resulting judgements. External examiners will, therefore, be able to audit the work of the assessment board because of their full membership of them. Provided these requirements are satisfied, informal preparatory meetings may be held.

15. Assessment boards have the authority to establish subsidiary boards, for example to deal with reassessments. External examiners have the right to attend such meetings, if they so wish, in order to complete their audit.

**Assessment Boards**

16. The University’s fields of study are modular and credit based. Assessment board arrangements can be complex in modular schemes, particularly where
there are interdisciplinary fields and significant numbers of combined fields. The University has adopted a two tiered system of Module Assessment Boards (MABs) which report to Programme Assessment Boards (PABs). A MAB handles a defined group of modules and a PAB handles one or more fields. There are clear rules for the responsibilities of each of these types of board, primarily agreeing module marks and the reassessment recommendations for modules at MABs and recommending awards and progression at PABs (clear processes are in place for dealing with mitigating circumstances, compensation etc. to ensure that double counting does not take place and full details are provided in the UG/PG regulations).

17. In all cases at least one external examiner is appointed to a MAB. Where several MABs in related subjects report to a PAB, experienced representatives from the group of MAB external examiners will be appointed to the PAB.

18. It is therefore possible for an external examiner to be appointed to a MAB only or to both a MAB and a PAB. This will be explained further during induction of newly appointed external examiners and the external examiner report form allows for the possibility of two types of appointment, MAB only or MAB and PAB.

*Note: the University does not appoint external examiners to PABs alone, all are involved in the work of MABs.*

21. In some instances there is no overlap of fields and the MAB and PAB both map directly onto the same group of modules. This may often be the case in professionally accredited fields. In such cases at least two external examiners are appointed to the field. The field will still be governed by either the undergraduate or postgraduate regulations and the assessment board is managed in two parts, firstly as a MAB to agree module marks and subsequently as a PAB to consider awards and progression (further details will be provided locally).

22. The arrangements described above are designed to ensure that all the students who take a module are considered at the same MAB with the same standards applied to them all and audited by the same external examiner(s). Where two external examiners are associated with a MAB they may each take responsibility for a separate sub-group of modules or they may co-audit some or all of the modules.

**Verification of the recommendations of assessment boards**

23. The agreed final recommendations of an assessment board are the collective, consensus views of the board members, including the external examiners. It is expected that the chair of the board will review all recommendations with the board to ensure that they are approved by the board and can be accurately recorded by the minuting secretary. The University does not additionally require the formality of the signature(s) of the external examiner(s) at this stage. It is subsequently the responsibility of the chair of the board and the secretary to the board to ensure that published results’ lists accurately reflect the assessment board’s deliberations. By receipt of minutes, including a full record of recommendations, external examiners are in a position to audit the accuracy of the procedures and, if it ever became necessary, to audit any
aspect of the process in more detail.

Visits to Collaborative Partners
24. The nature and frequency of external examiner visits should be noted in the Liaison Document. As a guide, for validated provision there should normally be one external examiner visit in any one year (this would normally coincide with an assessment board). External Examiners should be given the opportunity to visit franchised provision offered at collaborative partners (to be determined at local induction).

Involvement of external examiners in validation, review, approval of changes to fields and ‘consultancy’ related to fields
25. Current external examiners must not be involved in validation/internal subject reviews of the fields/programmes they are appointed to because they are part of the process being reviewed. Thus external examiners should not be involved in consultancy directly in response to issues arising from their audit role. Once advice has been offered, its consideration becomes the responsibility of the academic staff of the University. Neither should external examiners be involved in broad aspects of ‘consultancy’ not directly associated with assessment. The University is committed to a view that the independent audit role of external examiners must be protected. The integrity of the process is threatened if external examiners are required to audit and pass judgement on processes and procedures that they have helped to develop.

26. External examiners must be informed at the earliest possible date about changes to the curriculum. The University does not require that external examiners be consulted about such changes. However, field teams may wish to seek the advice of external examiners where changes arise directly out of the audit of assessment.

External examiners’ reports
27. All external examiners, as part of their contract with the University, are required to submit an annual report. The University has adopted a standard report format which must be completed on-line. In addition to responses to key questions about standards, processes and procedures, external examiners are given the opportunity to write unrestricted commentaries on any matters arising from their audit. They are also asked to detail any areas of good practice and/or recommendations for enhancement.

28. External examiners with responsibility for collaborative fields will be required to comment on each partner (as appropriate) that offers the field. This may take the form of particular questions within one report or separate reports. The precise format will depend upon the nature of the collaboration and external examiner arrangements. The reporting requirements will be made clear at appointment and at induction by the relevant Head of School or equivalent.

29. The University regards the external examiner’s report as a critical part of its quality assurance procedures. It is part of the contract with external examiners that the required report is produced annually. If an external examiner, following a reminder, does not submit a report within one month of the module/programme assessment board, or the report is considered to be too cursory to be of value and requests for amplification are not responded to, the
contract may be terminated forthwith (see section I, paragraph 41). The report will be regarded as a public document within the University and form part of the documentation for ISR panels, professional bodies, QAA reviewers and Boards of Study (which includes student representatives). Individual students can also make an email request to QAE for an external examiner’s report and the corresponding response relating to their programme. If necessary, external examiners can submit a separate confidential letter to the Vice-Chancellor. The confidential letter should be submitted in addition to the annual report but the latter can refer to the fact that a confidential letter is also being sent without disclosing the details. An acknowledgement letter will be sent to the examiner from the VC within one week of receipt of the letter. The examiner will receive a formal response, following a detailed investigation into the matter, within four weeks of receipt of the letter.

**QAA’s Concerns Scheme**

30. If an external examiner is not satisfied with the outcome of internal University procedures to investigate a concern he/she has raised, the External Examiner is entitled to raise the issue with QAA via the QAA Concerns Scheme. Further information on the Scheme can be found on the QAA website at: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/qaa-concerns-scheme.pdf

**Internal publication of External Examiners’ names and institution**

31. A list of all external examiners’ names and institutions will be accessible, by students, on the internal ‘My Kingston’ website. Please note that students are strictly prohibited from contacting external examiners regarding any aspect of their programme of study. If you are contacted by a student, for any reason, please do not respond but inform the University via extexam@kingston.ac.uk

**Feedback to external examiners**

32. The University requires that external examiners should be provided with feedback following discussion of their reports by the field team. This feedback should consist of an itemised response to the report using the University’s response template. It is the responsibility of the Faculty to ensure that an appropriate response is made to the External Examiner. This should be done as soon as possible after receipt of the external examiner’s report. Both the external examiner’s report and response will be submitted to the subsequent Board of Study for note.

**Data protection, freedom of information and copyright**

33. The University will use personal data submitted by the external examiner for the payment of fees and expenses, and for other necessary communication in connection with the external examiner’s contract. Where required for these purposes, this data will be shared with other departments of the University.

34. In accordance with the University’s Data Protection Policy which is based upon the Data Protection Act 2018, staff members must not disclose external examiners’ personal data, including contact details, to any person or body outside the University without the consent of the external examiner.

35. A list of all external examiners’ names together with the name of their institution will be accessible, by students, on the internal ‘My Kingston’ website.
36. An external examiner’s report will be made available to University staff, students and/or collaborative programme partners as part of the quality assurance/annual monitoring procedure. External examiners’ reports may be circulated as part of an internal or external audit.

37. Marks, comments and opinions expressed by an external examiner about individual students during the assessment process may be disclosed to the student concerned, if the student makes a Subject Access Request under the Data Protection Act.

38. An external examiner is entitled to make a Subject Access Request under the Data Protection Act to see memoranda, emails and other communications relating to the their appointment, including opinions expressed in a professional capacity about their appointment.

39. Under the Freedom of Information Act, the University will provide copies of external examiners’ reports to third parties who make a lawful request for these. Reports will normally retain examiners’ names. The University will consider any reasonable request from external examiners to anonymise their reports. Such a request should be made in writing and submitted with the report.

40. Copyright in all external examiners’ reports will be owned by the University. Examiners will not be permitted to retain their moral rights (under the Copyright Act) in the reports as the University may choose to anonymise the reports, as appropriate.

41. External examiners will be granted access to the University’s External Examiners’ Reporting System, to Canvas (the University’s virtual learning environment) and Box. Further guidance on access to module material and sample student work will be provided by the department/school. External examiners are not permitted to add, remove or delete material from module boxes.